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## VICE, BLAMEWORTHINESS AND CULTURAL IGNORANCE

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### INTRODUCTION

Widespread cultural ignorance has seemed to many to be exculpatory. It seems that ancient slaveholders, 1950s sexists, and, more controversially, present day meat eaters, are morally ignorant – they do not know that what they are doing is wrong.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps these agents are ignorant in a way that does not reflect badly on them. Something about the situation where ignorance is widespread seems to indicate that their ignorance is not culpable.

In this paper we argue that ignorance can be culpable even in a situation of widespread cultural ignorance. However, it is not usually culpable through a previous self-conscious act of wrongdoing.<sup>2</sup> We argue that ignorance can be culpable if the ignorance results from a flawed will, and we argue that understanding a flawed will in terms of a vice is very useful here. In particular, moral ignorance<sup>3</sup> often results from the exercise of a moral-epistemic vice, and this renders subsequent acts blameworthy, even when the ignorance is widespread.

### 1. IGNORANCE AND BLAMEWORTHINESS

Ignorance is a prime example of a factor that can render an agent blameless for an otherwise problematic action. For example, if we see Brian pouring poison into his partner's cup of tea, we are likely to blame Brian for performing this action. However, if we later learn that Brian was ignorant of some relevant fact (he thought the poison was milk, for example) then we will realise that blame may not be appropriate on this occasion. As Strawson says, ignorance is a paradigmatic excuse. Strawson distinguishes between two groups of considerations that count as excuses: those that apply to an act, and those that apply to agents. In his account of the first group, Strawson says:

To the first group belong all those which might give occasion for the employment of such expressions as 'He didn't mean to', 'He hadn't realized', 'He didn't know'... They do not suggest that the agent is any way an inappropriate object of that kind of demand for goodwill or regard which is reflected in our ordinary reactive attitudes. They suggest instead that the fact of injury was not in this case incompatible with that demand's being fulfilled, that the fact of injury was quite consistent with the agent's attitude and intentions being just what we demand they should be.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The first two examples have been discussed in the literature. See Moody-Adams (1994) and Rosen (2003).

<sup>2</sup> Holly Smith (1983) calls these tracing cases. Some writers (not Smith herself) have argued that this is the *only* way that ignorance can be culpable. See Rosen (2003, 2004, 2008); Zimmerman (1997, 2008); and Levy (2011).

<sup>3</sup> Of course, it can be difficult to determine what counts as moral ignorance. It is hard to draw the line between what is moral and what is factual. Is the belief that some races are less intelligent than others a moral or a factual mistake? We will use a wide definition of normative ignorance, erring on the side of including possibly factual beliefs.

<sup>4</sup> Strawson (1962), as reprinted in Watson (ed.) (2003) pp. 77-78.

If Brian was ignorant of the fact that he was pouring poison into the tea, then we do not have any definite reason to suppose that his action demonstrates a lack of good will. However, it is possible to add to the example so that we should once again be suspicious of Brian. Suppose several signs had been placed in the kitchen warning users that all of the milk had been replaced with poison, and that the container from which Brian poured was clearly marked 'POISON'. Suppose also that Brian stands to inherit a lot of money if his partner dies, and that their relationship has been painfully awful for years. Further, suppose that Brian glances at the signs and looks away immediately, telling himself that there is no reason for him to read them. When the example is fleshed out in this way, it once again becomes intuitive to suppose that Brian is blameworthy for his action – his ignorance is affected, or motivated.

Michele Moody-Adams has argued that cultural ignorance is often a bit like this.<sup>5</sup> It is not entirely clear how we should characterise affected ignorance, but we can accept that people do sometimes render themselves ignorant, and that when they do this, they have a flawed will and are blameworthy. Imagine the editor of a tabloid newspaper, who says to her reporters, 'I want to know what Celebrity X gets up to, who she talks to, who she sees and who she sleeps with – get me something no other newspaper has published'. In such a case the boss may, quite deliberately, avoid any conversation with her employees about the methods they have used, and indeed, curtail any encounter where she may be forced to confront direct evidence that her employees are hacking cell phones. In such a case it is of course tendentious to claim that the editor is genuinely ignorant. She might argue later in court, 'I don't even know how to hack phones, I don't know where my employees would have found out, I don't know how much it would cost, or how they could have afforded it on their salaries and still made it worthwhile!'. There are, of course, a lot of things the editor genuinely didn't know, but it seems very unlikely that she did not know, at some level, that phones were being hacked.<sup>6</sup> The editor seems blameworthy.

In this case it is not clear that the ignorance is genuine. Insofar as it is genuine, it stems from previous culpable acts: the editor knew that she might find out something unpleasant if she did certain things, and so *in that knowledge* she avoided those actions. Moody-Adams argues that our relationship to the available evidence in our own culture may be similarly suspect, though in the case of widespread cultural ignorance the situation is obviously more complex. Moody-Adams argues that culture is not an alien and monolithic force. There can be cracks in the edifice, and this is how change happens. All cultural belief systems are perpetuated and re-shaped by the actions and expectations of individuals. She stresses that a culture is not an agent, only people are agents, and they are not necessarily blinded by their culture. Thus, in many cases, people can be culpable; they willingly and (implicitly) knowingly engage in their cultural vices, and they could do otherwise. Moody-Adams discusses the case of Ancient Greek slaveholders, who, she argues, knew (at some level) that slavery was wrong, but continued with it because it served their interests.

It is possible that some cultural ignorance is motivated ignorance in one of these senses. If that is right, then there is no difficulty in seeing that it is blameworthy. Either the so-called ignorance is

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<sup>5</sup> See Moody Adams (1994 and 1997).

<sup>6</sup> This is structurally similar to Moody-Adams' example (1994) p. 301.

not really ignorance at all, but a complex state of denial such that the agent knows at some level that her acts are morally problematic or, the ignorance is brought about by a culpable process. The paradigmatic cases of culpable ignorance come about through self-consciously wrong acts, but arguably, ignorance can also be culpable when it is brought about by negligence, carelessness and so on. Ignorance is often motivated – I don't want to know how messy the kitchen is, so I don't go in there. But it may be that I avoid the kitchen semi-consciously, or unconsciously, rather than consciously. Most cases of moral ignorance are cases where the ignorance has come about without any conscious act. Yet, we will argue, moral ignorance can be culpable in those cases too.

The idea that one can be morally culpable without a self-conscious action is familiar in recent literature on moral responsibility. For example, Nomy Arpaly argues that, in general, moral self-awareness is not required for moral worth.<sup>7</sup> Arpaly argues, using the case of Huck Finn, that what makes someone praiseworthy is not that they are motivated by doing the right thing in the *de dicto* sense. On Arpaly's account, praiseworthiness depends on being motivated directly by the reasons that make a choice the morally right one, i.e. being motivated by moral value *de re*, not *de dicto*. Huck is responsive to actual moral reasons. He 'feels' (at some level) that Jim is a person, that Jim's liberty matters, and that he should help Jim.<sup>8</sup> Huck is motivated by these things, even though he cannot express them, and, indeed, could not be said to know them at all. This is why Huck is praiseworthy for his act of helping Jim. Huck's ignorance of the moral facts is irrelevant.

Arpaly's point is that moral worth is independent of a conscious grasp of moral status. Arpaly's view is representative of a school of thought, often called the 'Attributability view', or 'Attributionism', that locates moral responsibility in an agent's deep evaluative attitudes, rather than what she does in a self-aware way.<sup>9</sup> When people act wrongly without knowing that what they are doing is wrong they are not usually motivated by badness itself. They are usually motivated by something that is not itself bad (love, money, fame) or they are overwhelmed by motives that, while not admirable, do not constitute direct *de re* motivation to the bad (greed, fear, passion). Angela Smith uses an example of someone forgetting their friend's birthday.<sup>10</sup> It is not that she has really bad motivations, it is just that she does not care enough about her friend – something is revealed in her action that she herself is not aware of. Her action reveals a flawed will.

Our argument here is broadly sympathetic to an attributability view, but we are making a different point. Even if Arpaly, Smith and others are right that there are cases where an agent manifests a flawed will though she is not consciously acting wrongly, there are other cases where

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<sup>7</sup> Arpaly (2003). See also Arpaly and Schroeder (1999) and their more recent work.

<sup>8</sup> Arpaly is of course talking about Mark Twain's novel, in which a young White boy, raised in a racist society, who does not consciously reject the racist orthodoxy, helps a Black slave to escape. See Ibid. Chapter 3.

<sup>9</sup> See Angela Smith (2005) for a useful discussion of the difference between volitionist and attributionist views. See Watson (1996) for one of the first defences of the attributability view. More recently, T.M. Scanlon (1998, 2008); Nomy Arpaly (2003, 2006); Angela Smith (2005, 2008); Hieronymi (2008); Sher (2009); and Shoemaker (2015) have all developed versions of an attributability view. Matthew Talbert has deployed such a view in discussions of the ancient slaveholders (2013).

<sup>10</sup> Angela Smith (2005) p.236

that is not so clear.<sup>11</sup> We are interested in the tricky cases where ignorance does, at least *prima facie*, seem to have the effect of undermining the claim that the agent's will is flawed. Important cases of cultural ignorance may involve bad acts that do not, in themselves, indicate poor quality of will. Take the 1952 American father, who educates his sons but not his daughter. He loves his daughter, and he wants nothing but good for her, he just has a mistaken view about her capabilities and rights.

The case of the 1952 American father is thus not like the cases that Attributionists focus on. His failure is not a failure of motivation at the time of action, in the way that the friend who forgets a birthday exhibits a failure of motivation. The father is not motivated *de re* to the bad, and nor is he insufficiently motivated by his daughter's happiness (we can suppose). Rather, he has made a prior error. If that is right, then the crucial question is whether his prior error, in accepting that women are fitted for very different roles in life than men, is itself culpable. Our argument is that the way in which agents *become* ignorant can, in some cases, be indicative of a flawed will. In Holly Smith's terminology, we are arguing that widespread cultural ignorance can be seen as a tracing case. It can be traced back to a moral-epistemic vice.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. VIRTUES AND VICES

Virtues and vices, at least in the sense that we are interested in here, are character traits. As a starting point, this is fairly uncontroversial as far as discussion of the moral virtues is concerned, but it may meet with some resistance from a sub-set of those working on the epistemic (or intellectual) virtues. Some 'reliabilist' virtue epistemologists have been willing to apply the term intellectual virtue to *any* feature of an agent that reliably leads to epistemically valuable ends such as truth or knowledge. This approach results in the acceptance of the virtue status of abilities like reliable eyesight or a good memory.<sup>13</sup> It is not our intention to argue directly against this alternative usage of the term virtue. Rather, it is worth mentioning in order to set it aside and to make clear that, for our purposes, being a character trait is a necessary condition for being a virtue or a vice.

A distinction can be made between different ways of understanding how we decide which traits are virtues and which are vices. As Jason Baehr puts it, this distinction is between "competence" conceptions of the virtues and "personal worth" conceptions.<sup>14</sup> On the competence conception, a virtue is a character trait that reliably helps to bring about some valuable end, while a vice is a character trait that reliably impedes or hinders the pursuit of that end. On the personal worth conception, virtues and vices are more intimately related to the agent's character in the sense that they involve the agent being motivated in a certain way. On what we can call a 'pure' form of the

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<sup>11</sup> Matt King (2009) argues that many of the cases that attributionists themselves use are ambiguous – sometimes an unfortunate act reflects nothing about an agent's character or deep motivations. Holly Smith (2011) argues that agents are blameworthy for acts done in ignorance only if a sufficient amount of their psychology is behind the bad act.

<sup>12</sup> As Smith points out (1983), in cases of culpable ignorance the benighting act has bad motives, but the acts done in ignorance need not themselves involve bad motivations. If not, then the blameworthiness of later acts is just inherited. Here we are focussing on this sort of culpable ignorance, where blameworthiness of later acts can be inherited.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Greco (2002). For a survey of the debate in epistemology see Baehr (2006).

<sup>14</sup> See Baehr (2007) p. 464. This distinction maps on to the generally accepted distinction between reliabilists and responsibilists in virtue epistemology. See also Battaly (2014).

personal worth conception, the motivation is *sufficient* for virtue, whereas on a ‘mixed’ version it is possible to demand some level of reliability in addition to the admirable motivation. Some examples of virtue theorists may help to make this clearer. In the moral realm, Julia Driver adheres to the competence conception, arguing that moral virtues are character traits that reliably bring about good outcomes.<sup>15</sup> Michael Slote accepts a pure form of the personal worth conception, believing that admirable motives are sufficient for virtue.<sup>16</sup> In the epistemic realm, Linda Zagzebski takes a mixed view, arguing that virtues involve both admirable motives and a sufficient level of reliability, whereas the reliabilists, such as John Greco, defend forms of the competence conception.<sup>17</sup> More recently, Quassim Cassam has argued in favour of the competence approach in relation to epistemic vices.<sup>18</sup>

It is important to point out that pluralism is an option here. Perhaps there is more than one form of virtue (and vice) and the different conceptions simply capture different forms. This is the point that Baehr is aiming to make when explaining the distinction in the first place.<sup>19</sup> And so, while we’ll be focusing on a personal worth understanding of the virtues and vices in this paper, this does not necessarily commit us to arguing that the competence conception is completely misguided.

On our view, a virtue is a character trait and being virtuous involves an agent’s motivations: we can expect a virtuous agent to be motivated in certain ways and in response to certain considerations. Virtuous agents have a good will in the sense that their motivations are admirable. One way in which a motivation can be admirable or virtuous is if it has a valuable target. For example, if we accept that the protection and promotion of well-being is valuable then we will be inclined to think that a motivation towards this can be virtuous. However, a valuable target is, plausibly, not enough. The motivation must also have certain features. Firstly, an agent’s motivation to promote well-being will not be sufficient for virtue if it is sporadic or fleeting. Instead, an admirable motivation must be sufficiently *persistent*. Furthermore, any motivation that counts as a virtue must be sufficiently *strongly felt*. That is, the motivation must not be so weak that, even if persistent, it would never be strong enough to actually prompt an agent into action. And thirdly, the motivation must be sufficiently *robust* in the sense that it will not be easily overridden by competing considerations. If an agent possesses a persistent and strongly felt motivation to promote well-being, but this motivation is always overridden by their competing aim of making as much money as possible, then we will not want to say that their motivation is sufficient for virtue. It is only when sufficient levels of persistence, strength and robustness are achieved that an agent’s motivation will be sufficient for the status of virtue.<sup>20</sup> For ease of use, we can refer to a motivation that meets the sufficient levels of persistence, strength

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<sup>15</sup> Driver (2001)

<sup>16</sup> Slote (2001)

<sup>17</sup> Zagzebski (1996) and Greco (2002) (As mentioned earlier, Greco does not stipulate that virtues must be character traits.)

<sup>18</sup> Cassam (forthcoming)

<sup>19</sup> Baehr (2007) pp. 464-465

<sup>20</sup> Our interest here is in what is required for a motivational trait to count *as a virtue*. Motivations that lack the necessary features may yet be referred to as “virtuous” in the loose sense that actions or outcomes or people may also be referred to as virtuous. But they will not *be* virtues as long as they lack the sufficient levels of persistence, strength and robustness.

and robustness as a *deep* motivation. On our personal worth conception, a virtue will necessarily involve a deep motivation towards some valuable end.

What, then, about the nature of vice on this conception? There will be (at least) two different ways in which a character trait can be classified as a vice, both of which concern a failure of the agent's good will. Firstly, vice can simply mirror the virtues by being actively directed towards bad targets. For example, the vice of sadistic cruelty might be directed towards causing harm to others. However, a second (and perhaps more common) possibility is that an agent possesses a serious failing in their motivation towards a valuable end. This will involve a problematic failure in the depth of the agent's motivation towards some good. So an agent who constantly passes up the opportunity to help others because of some competing motivation may well count as vicious. And this can be true even if the competing motivation is towards something which is not in itself bad. So an agent who is distracted by the opportunity to further their own interests might not be directed towards something that is bad, but the failing in the depth of their motivation towards the good still indicates a flawed will.<sup>21</sup> Vice, then, involves a motivational failing (in one of two ways) while virtue involves the possession of admirable motivations.

With all of this established, it is now possible to address the final taxonomical issue of how to distinguish moral virtues and vices from epistemic virtues and vices. And the picture that has been set out provides us with the resources to do this in a fairly straightforward manner. Moral virtues are those character traits that necessarily involve a deep motivation towards morally valuable targets, and the moral vices are those traits that necessarily involve a failure in this kind of motivation. Epistemic virtues are those character traits that involve a deep motivation towards epistemically valuable targets, epistemic vices are those that involve a failure in this kind of motivation. Of course, there is then the further question of which targets are morally and epistemically valuable. For now, we can simply use plausible examples of such targets, and leave an in-depth investigation of this issue for another time. In order to have examples to work with let us say that the protection and promotion of well-being is morally valuable (hence explaining the moral virtue status of kindness) and that the achieving of fair outcomes is morally valuable (hence explaining the moral virtue status of justice). In the epistemic realm, we can use the idea of "cognitive contact with reality" as utilised by Zagzebski, where this includes things such as true belief, knowledge, and understanding.<sup>22</sup> So, a character trait will be a moral virtue if it involves a deep motivation for the promotion of well-being or the achieving of fair outcomes. Moral vices involve a failure in motivations of this sort. And a character trait will be an epistemic virtue if it involves a deep motivation for cognitive contact with reality. Epistemic vices will involve a failure in motivations of this sort.

This way of understanding the nature of moral and epistemic vice leaves open the possibility that there can be character traits which straddle the standard distinction between the moral and the epistemic. This idea is one that has gained much traction in recent times, especially following

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<sup>21</sup> It is important to specify here that we are not claiming that lacking virtue is *always* vicious. There will be cases where the agent's lack of virtue is not a reflection on their character. This will be the case, for example, for cognitively impaired agents where the lack of actual virtue does not in any way reflect a failure of the will.

<sup>22</sup> Zagzebski (1996) Part II, Section 4.1

Miranda Fricker's work on epistemic injustice.<sup>23</sup> Fricker argues that it is possible to possess her proposed virtue of testimonial justice as either a moral or an epistemic virtue, or both.<sup>24</sup> And Fricker is not alone in acknowledging this possibility. For example, Zagzebski argues that *all* epistemic virtues are also moral virtues (because the epistemic is a sub-set of the moral).<sup>25</sup> On the picture that we have proposed, a trait will be both a moral and an epistemic vice (a moral-epistemic vice) when it involves a double failing in motivation. For an example, consider the following description of George W. Bush, which is discussed by William FitzPatrick:

[A] chief executive who is widely characterised by those involved with him (including politically friendly sources) as possessing unusual degrees of both incuriosity and certitude. There is a growing body of evidence that this is someone who “values loyalty above expertise,” has “a preference for advisers whose personal fortunes are almost entirely bound up with his own,” and “likes to surround himself with obsequious courtiers,” shutting out or attacking – with the help of those close to him – dissenting voices and sources of information that cannot be counted upon to support conclusions already held with a confidence bearing little resemblance to the available evidence.<sup>26</sup>

Here we have an agent who is clearly in possession of epistemic vice. We have very good reason to suspect that this behaviour is indicative of a failing in the motivation towards the epistemic good. However, there is a double failing in motivation here. There is also a failure of kindness and justice (that is, a failure of motivation towards both well-being and fairness). We have, then, a failing in both the moral and epistemic realms. The incuriosity and dogmatism on display are both epistemically and morally vicious, and clearly implicate the agent's character. This example highlights the possibility of traits that demonstrate a lack of motivational concern for both moral and epistemic goods, and such traits ought to be categorised as moral-epistemic vices.

On the personal worth conception that we have proposed, the discussion of virtue and vice matches closely with the account of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness provided by Arpaly (and discussed above). To possess a moral virtue is to be motivated by what is of actual moral value (such as the promotion of well-being) and is therefore praiseworthy. To possess a moral vice is *either* to be motivated by what is of moral disvalue (as in the case of sadistic cruelty) *or* to have a motivational failing regarding the moral good, and is therefore blameworthy. Given this, exercise of a moral-epistemic vice will also be blameworthy. Vice is blameworthy because it is a way of having a flawed will – either being motivated towards the wrong things or being insufficiently motivated towards the right things.<sup>27</sup>

It is worth emphasising that we are not committed to any particular account of what sort of blame or how much of it is appropriate when an agent displays a moral-epistemic vice. As

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<sup>23</sup> Fricker (2007). See also Medina (2013).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. pp. 120-123

<sup>25</sup> Zagzebski (1996) Part II, Section 3

<sup>26</sup> FitzPatrick (2008) p. 611

<sup>27</sup> While vice will involve a failure in motivation towards the good, it may be possible to have a motivation that is insufficient for virtue while not yet being flawed enough to class as a vice. This will be the case if we accept, as seems plausible, the existence of traits that are neither virtuous nor vicious.



Moody-Adams argues, our reluctance to blame in cases of moral ignorance may be based on a poor account of what blame is.<sup>28</sup> On her view we are in the grip of a false dichotomy: we see blame as either harsh and retributive or overly therapeutic, as when we explain bad behaviour by attributing a ‘syndrome’, such as sex addiction. There are lots of different ways to think of blame and blameworthiness, and we remain as neutral as possible on those questions here. What we are not neutral on is just that some sort of blame is appropriate, and that blame is properly blame, not merely negative assessment. Blame is appropriate in cases of vice because the agent has a flawed will.

### 3. VICE AND CULTURAL IGNORANCE

The question then, is whether agents in cases of widespread cultural ignorance can be said to have become ignorant through vice. Let’s distinguish three different sorts of situation where an agent is ignorant. In the first sort of situation, there is no available evidence at all. It is easy to think of cases of non-moral ignorance that look like this – there is no evidence available to us about many non-normative matters, and so there is no reason at all to suppose that our ignorance is caused by vice.<sup>29</sup> Of course, this doesn’t show that we don’t *have* such vices – our ignorance may be over determined. The point is just that a case with no available evidence is not an interesting case to discuss here: it will be very unclear whether vice is the primary cause of ignorance.

The second category of case where agents are ignorant is one in which they are ignorant despite there being plenty of evidence. In this case, there are various possibilities. One is that the agent is severely cognitively limited, and thus their ignorance is not reflective of bad motivations. Another possibility is that this particular agent, through bizarre circumstances, is not in a position to see the evidence, so in fact the evidence (though available in the sense that it is available to most agents) is not in fact available to this agent (e.g. she is locked in a room). Another possibility is that the agent is ignorant through a previous act of clear eyed akrasia. Finally, the possibility we are interested in is that the agent is ignorant through vice. As we argued above, there are two ways that an agent might be ignorant through vice: through a purely epistemic vice, and through a moral-epistemic vice.

FitzPatrick’s example of George W. Bush’s policy making (discussed above) is paradigmatic of moral-epistemic vice in action. This is clearly an example of an environment in which there was plenty of evidence available. It is precisely because the evidence is so clearly available that we can be confident in attributing vice in this case. The vice is a moral-epistemic vice because Bush’s motivations are problematic: if he had been more motivated by kindness and justice he would have been less concerned with loyalty and more concerned with expertise. Bush’s ignorance is affected, or motivated, in one of the clearly culpable senses discussed above.

So that leaves a third sort of case, cases where there is evidence, but it is scant, or obscured by cultural factors. In such cases, it is much less plausible that ignorance is motivated.

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<sup>28</sup> See Moody Adams (1994 and 1997).

<sup>29</sup> It is a bit more controversial to imagine cases of moral ignorance where there is no evidence at all – perhaps the evidence for moral facts is always available – it depends on our account of moral reality. But we don’t need to worry about that issue here. In the cases we are interested in there is at least some evidence.

There is wide though tacit agreement in the literature that cases of cultural moral ignorance fall into this category.<sup>30</sup> What should we say about moral ignorance in these cases? The standard view is that ignorance in these cases is not culpable. But the argument is not that there is *no* evidence. In fact, it is not entirely clear how the argument is supposed to work. The worry is something along the lines of, ‘it would not be reasonable to expect a normal agent to grasp the correct view’, ‘it would take someone exceptional to see the truth’, or ‘it would be too difficult to see the evidence’. We might understand these vague thoughts in two different ways: first, there is a thought that the mere fact that everyone else is making the same mistake exonerates me. Second, is a rather different thought: the fact that everyone makes this mistake shows that there is some underlying factor that is exculpatory. The underlying factor must be something like difficulty. The thought might be that when evidence is obscure, it would be very difficult to see the truth, and so we cannot be blamed for our mistake. Or, to put it another way, only a moral hero would see the truth in these situations.

Let us take these in turn. First, is there some sort of conceptual connection between what most people do, or what the average agent does, and what is blameworthy? The argument against blameworthiness in cases of cultural ignorance is often put in terms of what it would be reasonable to expect. But there are two ways to understand reasonable expectation: normatively and statistically. If we are using the normative sense of ‘reasonable’, then of course there is a conceptual connection between blameworthiness and what it would be reasonable to expect. But that leaves open whether or not the average person will, as a matter of fact, behave in that way. On the other hand, if we claim that we should tie the normative sense of blameworthiness to the statistical sense of reasonableness, then that is a substantive issue. It is certainly not obvious that we should use the concepts that way.

There are no good reasons to think that blameworthiness must be distributed on a curve. It is possible that we might all have certain moral or moral-epistemic vices. Indeed, this is one of the lessons from Fricker’s *Epistemic Injustice*. Fricker points out that the changing nature of prejudice in society means that we are all likely to be testimonially unjust with regard to at least some widespread prejudices.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in ‘Environmental Virtue Ethics’, Rosalind Hursthouse proposes a “new” virtue of “respect for nature”, and points out that “none of us” really possess this virtue.<sup>32</sup> In fact, it is plausible that the majority of people not only lack the virtue, but actually possess the corresponding vice. Examples like this suggest that there is no conceptual barrier to there being virtues that the majority of people lack, or vices that the majority of people possess.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See Moody-Adams (1994 and 1997) and Calhoun (1989). Rosen says it would take a moral genius (2003, p.66). FitzPatrick (2008) talks about how difficult it would be to see the truth in these situations.

<sup>31</sup> However, as we will discuss, Fricker does not believe that this injustice is necessarily blameworthy. On what the failing amounts to, see (for example) Fricker (2007) pp. 89-91. On the point that all of us are likely to be unjust regarding at least some prejudices, see pp. 97-98. It is worth pointing out that in unjust societies, referring to ‘what everyone thinks’ often means just what the dominant group thinks. See Charles Mills (1997) and subsequent works for discussion of white privilege as it relates to epistemology.

<sup>32</sup> See Hursthouse (2007) esp. p. 167

<sup>33</sup> For a recent discussion of how widespread moral virtue and vice possession might be, see Miller (2014).

Compare arguments about demandingness in normative theory. Utilitarianism is often accused of being too demanding a theory. What this complaint means is not clear, but one possibility is that the worry is that most people will not in fact do what utilitarianism tells them to do. It is an open question whether that succeeds as a criticism. It is open to utilitarians to reply that it remains the case that people *should* act in a more altruistic way, even if they, in fact, do not and will not. Again, we do not have to say that people are moral heroes simply because they are in the minority in acting well.

So the fact that most agents do not respond to the evidence in a given situation is not itself reason to think that they must be blameless. It is conceptually possible that a large majority of agents are blameworthy. This is true regardless of whether we think in terms of atomic fault or vice. It is possible that the vast majority of wealthy agents fail in their obligations to those in poverty. Equally, it is possible that the vast majority of agents in some particular social group are in the grip of a moral (or moral-epistemic) vice.

So much for the suggestion that there is a necessary connection between what average agents are like and what is blameworthy. The other thought in the neighbourhood is that if seeing the truth would be very difficult, then it cannot be blameworthy not to see it. This seems to be Miranda Fricker's view. Her view is subtle: she argues for responsibility but not blameworthiness in cases of cultural ignorance. She is discussing an example in which a character in a movie, Herbert Greenleaf, fails to take seriously the testimony of a female character. She says:

If we judge Greenleaf in the light of the full ethical resources of his day, then while we may find that the epistemic injustice he does Marge is not culpable (he judged routinely), we may still see it as less than it might have been (less than exceptional)... The distinction between exceptional and routine moral judgement, then, points to the possibility of a more nuanced range of moral attitudes to historically and culturally distant others; regardless of whether one holds to the internal or the external interpretation of reasons; for it allows us to avoid the hubris of deeming them blameworthy for actions not routinely regarded as wrong in their culture, while still holding them morally responsible to this or that extent, depending on how nearly available the exceptional moral move is judged to have been.<sup>34</sup>

On Fricker's view it would have taken something exceptional for Greenleaf to see Marge as a reliable source, and we cannot reasonably expect people to behave in exceptional ways. So although people like Greenleaf are responsible for their actions, they are not blameworthy. Again, the point here cannot just be that as a matter of statistical fact most people don't transcend their culture so therefore it is not blameworthy. Rather, the thought must be that there is an underlying factor that explains why most people don't transcend their culture, and that underlying factor is exculpatory.

FitzPatrick shares the general reluctance to think of ignorant agents in situations of cultural ignorance as blameworthy. FitzPatrick's argument is chiefly intended to undermine the strong

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<sup>34</sup> Fricker (2007) p.105

voluntarist claim made by Zimmerman and Rosen, that a previous act of clear-eyed akrasia is required to render ignorance culpable.<sup>35</sup> FitzPatrick argues that much normative ignorance results from vices such as overconfidence, arrogance, dismissiveness, laziness, dogmatism, incuriosity, self-indulgence, and contempt. These are all plausibly moral-epistemic vices in our sense, and thus blameworthy, although they may not involve clear-eyed akrasia.

However, FitzPatrick's main focus is on cases where a vice is exercised 'voluntarily'.<sup>36</sup> In cases of cultural ignorance, according to FitzPatrick, vice is not exercised voluntarily. It is not entirely clear what that means: FitzPatrick says various things about why agents in cases of cultural ignorance might not be blameworthy, but he does not seem to imagine that there is no evidence at all. He uses the language of reasonable expectation – he does not think it would be reasonable to expect people to see through their culture's orthodoxy. At least part of FitzPatrick's worry is that it would be very *difficult* for agents to see the truth.<sup>37</sup>

Does difficulty exculpate? In contrast to impossibility (which certainly exculpates), we have a conceptually open question here – there is nothing built into our concept of blameworthiness to say that we cannot be blamed if it would have been difficult to do the right thing. One might think that difficulty mitigates blameworthiness, and one might not.<sup>38</sup> If one's entire culture is producing evidence and testimony that (for example) women are essentially different and somewhat inferior to men, surely that is what it is rational to believe?<sup>39</sup> One *could* think harder and form the view that the evidence is circularly produced and the testimony is due to ideological forces, but this is a lot to ask, too much for normal agents. If a bad moral practice is epistemically justified, a natural line of thought goes, it must be morally excusable.

Whatever we think about difficulty in general, we should agree that there is something odd about appealing to difficulty as an exculpatory factor when it is obvious that there is a vice operating. Let's take George Bush again. In what sense would it have been difficult for him to see the truth? There is an internal barrier, his vice, and so although it is true that it would have been difficult, it is not at all clear that that is exculpatory. In fact, the thing that makes it difficult for him to see the truth is the very same thing that makes him blameworthy for not seeing the truth.<sup>40</sup> In the case where there is cultural ignorance, the idea is that the barrier is external, not internal, and so not connected to the will of the agent. But remember that we are considering a case where there is *some* evidence – where some people do see the truth. So the difference between the ones who do and the ones who do not is not simply an external difference. Rather, the difference could be that the ones who do see

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<sup>35</sup> For references to Rosen and Zimmerman (and related literature) see footnote 2.

<sup>36</sup> See FitzPatrick (2008) p.605. FitzPatrick's reliance on voluntariness seems problematic here – see Levy (2009); Talbert (2013) and Mason (2015).

<sup>37</sup> See p.600 note 24 on the difficulty FitzPatrick imagines Aristotle would have had in seeing the wrongness of slavery.

<sup>38</sup> See chapters in this volume by Guerrero and Bradford.

<sup>39</sup> Cheshire Calhoun takes this view in her discussion of cultural ignorance (Calhoun 1989), and Calhoun thinks that although blame is not warranted, reproach is. Arpaly allows that this is a possibility, and that if the evidence is genuinely misleading there is no blameworthiness (2003, p.104).

<sup>40</sup> Talbert (2013) makes this point too. Hursthouse (1999, Chapter 4) discusses the issue of internal barriers in her discussion of Kant and Aristotle on moral motivation.

the truth are differently motivated than the ones who do not. We need to think carefully about the relationship between the agents we are considering, and their evidence.

The evidence in cases of cultural ignorance is very complex. Ideology functions to reinforce false beliefs and obscure more useful ways of thinking about situations. Is the fact that there are so few women in philosophy evidence that women are fundamentally ill-suited to philosophy? Or is it evidence that they have been and are systematically discriminated against? There is still disagreement about this, and intelligent people on both sides take themselves to be doing their very best with respect to the evidence. This reflection leads to a further point: evidence in these cases is not something we just ‘have’. It is something we have to interpret. We may lack the tools to do this, tools we would only have reached through exposure to feminist theory. As Calhoun puts it:

Such neologisms as “sexual harassment” and “date rape” facilitate both our seeing moral issues where we had not previously and our drawing connections between these and already acknowledged moral issues (e.g., between rape by strangers and date rape). But feminists also reshape moral language in less readily accessible ways – “marginalize,” “the Other,” “silencing,” “rapist society,” “marriage as prostitution.”<sup>41</sup>

We might take this (as Calhoun does) as reason to think that, epistemically, there is no blameworthiness here. But this is not simply an epistemic issue. What is at stake in this sort of case is of moral value. The aim that guides whether or not you should seek more information is not itself an epistemic aim. Imagine that I must decide on a policy for my business to follow with respect to palm oil use. If I am only concerned to make as much money as possible, I have no need to find out about animal welfare issues. If, on the other hand, I am concerned to be moral, I should find out more about palm oil, and orang-utan habitat. There can be no purely epistemic reason to seek more information. We should, as Richard Feldman argues, take the notion of epistemic justification to concern only the relationship between actual possessed evidence and belief. As Feldman says, there may be further reasons to look for more evidence, but they are not epistemic reasons.<sup>42</sup> The same applies to *interpretation* of our evidence.

Thus so long as there is some evidence for the falsity of the dominant moral view in situations of cultural ignorance, (and there usually is), the question of the morally relevant motivations of the ignorant agents arises. And the acknowledged fact that it would be difficult to see through the dominant moral view does not settle any issues of epistemic or moral blameworthiness. The question is, ‘what explains the persistence of ignorance?’. Crucially, ‘is the persistence of ignorance explained through flawed motivations concerning the moral good?’.

We have now argued that the fact that ignorance is widespread does not settle the issue of whether such ignorance is culpable. What matters is whether the ignorance is caused or sustained by the presence of a flawed will. There is nothing in the concept of vice that rules out the possibility that vice possession may also be widespread. It is important to now consider whether

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<sup>41</sup> Calhoun (1989), p. 397

<sup>42</sup> Feldman, 1998, p.250-252

there might actually be examples of widely held moral-epistemic vices that can explain cases of cultural ignorance, and what those vices might look like.

At one point, Moody-Adams says that the most common sort of affected ignorance stems from a common human fault: our tendency to avoid acknowledging that we are fallible, and that even our most deeply held convictions might be wrong.<sup>43</sup> On the terminology set out above, this tendency will be a contender for a moral-epistemic vice. Having a motivation for truth that is overridden by a competing (even if unconscious) desire to view oneself as infallible is one way of lacking a sufficiently robust motivation to the epistemic good. And in cases where the truths in question are of moral significance, an agent's tendency to be motivated by this competing desire may also reveal a flawed motivation to the moral good. The motivational tendency highlighted by Moody-Adams may then come out as a potentially widespread moral-epistemic vice. And we might include this trait in a loosely defined group of vices that involve a motivation to self-aggrandizement.<sup>44</sup>

Consider another possible example of a widespread moral-epistemic vice. In the virtue ethics tradition, it is accepted that one way in which an agent can be led astray is by a competing desire for bodily pleasures. When this competing desire overrides an agent's motivation towards well-being or fairness, then that agent will possess the vice of *intemperance*, and will possess it as a *moral* vice. It is also possible that the agent's desire for bodily pleasures will override their motivation for truth or knowledge. Drinking too much at a conference dinner such that you are unable to attend the talks the following day may well provide evidence of intemperance possessed as an *epistemic* vice. And if we think that attendance is somehow demanded by considerations of fairness or well-being then the intemperance in question may in fact be a moral-epistemic vice. Intemperance – understood as a tendency for one's admirable motivations to be overridden by the competing motivation for bodily pleasures – can therefore be added to our list of moral-epistemic vices that may well be widespread.

Clearly, we also sometimes allow other sorts of pleasure to overtake us, and this is particularly relevant in the context of cultural ignorance. There are non-bodily pleasures that seduce us into epistemic laziness. We don't have a well-developed vocabulary for talking about these pleasures, but we are familiar with the idea. For example, we talk about new experiences, both physical and intellectual, as pushing us out of our 'comfort zone'. The implicit idea is that our existing, familiar, beliefs are 'comfortable'. This is not bodily comfort, but a sort of *intellectual comfort*. Evidence resistance can often be explained by the competing motivation of 'staying comfortable' in this sense. Again, loosely, we might think of a family of vices involving a motivation to comfort in this sense. We could call these vices of laziness.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Moody-Adams (1994) p.301

<sup>44</sup> Along similar lines, Medina (2013) characterises several vices that involve motivations of this sort – including vices of arrogance – which will be more common among oppressor groups in hierarchical societies. For more on the difference between the epistemic perspective of the oppressor and the oppressed, see Mills (1997).

<sup>45</sup> Again, see Medina (2013) for a discussion of vices of this sort.

Various examples of such vices come up in Elizabeth Anderson's recent discussion of socially hierarchical societies and different perspectives on social change.<sup>46</sup> One case in particular provides a good example of the moral-epistemic vice of laziness. Anderson refers to research in psychology showing that people tend to attribute the (bad) behaviour of others to innate dispositions and not to circumstances. One might think that this is a merely cognitive bias, like a tendency to make faulty probability estimates. But like many cognitive biases, it is easy to see that the underlying motivation is practical, and morally relevant. If I believe that your criminality is innate, then there is nothing I can do about it, and so that is a much more comfortable belief than the alternative, which is to believe that your criminality is down to the inequalitarian society that I am largely a beneficiary of. Many of our 'cognitive' errors about the way the world works can be understood as vices of laziness – that is, a tendency to allow our motivation towards intellectual comfort to override our motivations to truth and justice.<sup>47</sup> Well known biases such as the just world bias and the control bias can be understood as moral-epistemic vices in the laziness family. They are not purely cognitive: our motivations towards comfort override our motivations to truth and justice.

Another vice in this family involves a motivation to conformity. There is a sort of comfort in having the same views and outlook as those whom we take to be our peers, and we tend to seek conformity with others even at the expense of other, more important values. Of course, this is controversial. Many epistemologists think that trust in others is an epistemic virtue, and that is surely right up to a point. The idea here is that it often goes too far. Stanley Milgram's experiments (another controversial example, of course) seem to show that so long as the subject is being told what to do by the experimenter, they will administer powerful electric shocks to someone that they believe is suffering considerably (in fact the person being 'shocked' is a confederate of the experimenter). That seems to show that we take what we think of as 'norms' in a situation very seriously – thinking we are in line with 'everyone else' has a huge effect on what we are willing to do. When other subjects (also confederates) refused to obey the experimenter, there was a huge drop in obedience.<sup>48</sup> Another example is meat eating. Vegetarian campaigners often appeal to the critical mass effect of moral progress, trying to get meat eaters to see that if it wasn't for the fact that so many other people also eat meat, they would probably find it appalling. In other words, the campaigners are trying to get people to see that they are more motivated by conformity than by evidence or morality.

As we said in analysing virtue, for a trait to be a virtue it must involve a motivation that is persistent, strongly felt and robust. The candidates for the sorts of moral-epistemic vice that plausibly underwrite moral ignorance in situations of cultural ignorance are all failures of robustness – cases where there is a competing motivation. And it seems to us that these are the most common sorts of case, cases where competing motivations towards self-aggrandizement (vices of arrogance), or towards comfort (vices of laziness) pull the agent in the wrong direction. But it may sometimes be the case that failing to examine the evidence carefully is not caused by a

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<sup>46</sup> Anderson 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Whereas the oppressed seem less likely to suffer from vices of arrogance, they do seem susceptible to vices of laziness. False consciousness, the tendency to internalize the oppressor's narrative, can be caused by vices of laziness. However, there are, of course asymmetries between the situation of the oppressor and the oppressed that will be relevant to how we think of blameworthiness.

<sup>48</sup> Milgram 1974

pull towards a competing motivation, but rather is just a sort of indifference, or apathy. These further cases would also count as instances of vice on our view. They exhibit a flawed motivation towards the good through failing to be sufficiently strongly felt. If the ignorance in situations of cultural ignorance implicates the presence of widespread moral-epistemic vices such as these, then that ignorance ought to be viewed as culpable.

## CONCLUSION

Many have assumed that widespread cultural ignorance exculpates those who are involved in otherwise morally problematic practices, such as the ancient slaveholders, 1950s sexists or contemporary meat eaters. In this paper we have sought to put pressure on that assumption. Firstly, we have contributed to the understanding of culpable ignorance in terms of vice possession by setting out a version of the personal worth conception of virtue and vice. Having a clearer account of the nature of virtue and vice, and of the connections between moral, epistemic and moral-epistemic vices, ought to help further the debate on this issue. Secondly, we have applied this understanding of virtue and vice to cases involving cultural ignorance. Given that there is no conceptual barrier to the widespread possession of vice, it becomes an open question whether or not cases of widespread cultural ignorance are culpable. We have attempted to support the idea that such ignorance may well be culpable by highlighting two clusters of moral-epistemic vice – vices of arrogance and vices of laziness – which may well be widespread. If the ignorance in cases of cultural ignorance is caused or sustained by the possession of moral-epistemic vices such as these, then that ignorance ought to be viewed as culpable, regardless of how widespread it happens to be.

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